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Does part-time work offer flexibility to employed mothers?

Using data from the 2017–18 American Time Use Survey Leave and Job Flexibilities Module, we evaluate the relationship between part-time work and job flexibility among civilian employed mothers who are wage and salary workers. Results show that mothers working part time are employed in jobs that lack many of the attributes that would characterize these jobs as flexible. Mothers in part-time jobs were less likely to have paid leave, work-at-home access, and advanced schedule notice. Although part-time jobs require fewer work hours, these shorter work hours may come at a cost of reduced flexibility, pay, and availability of family-friendly benefits.

The preponderance of women among part-time workers is often attributed to mothers' preferences to work in flexible or family-friendly jobs. Indeed, part-time work prevalence is higher among women and among mothers, in particular.¹ Prior research argues that mothers may be more likely to work part time because of the effort expended on family obligations and caregiving and their "secondary earner" status in which women's income is supplementary.² Most couples do not have equally demanding careers, and mothers more often scale back to accommodate family needs.³

The ability to work part-time hours may be considered a type of job flexibility. The shorter hours required in part-time jobs may allow workers to combine work and family responsibilities more easily.⁴ To the extent that jobs requiring long hours of work may be less compatible with family demands, scaling back to part time may enable some mothers to remain employed.⁵ Yet, research shows that part-time jobs typically lack benefits that would make them flexible and family friendly.⁶ Furthermore, jobs that predominantly employ mothers do not require less work effort.⁷ Nor are mothers more likely to work from home or have schedule flexibility compared with other workers.⁸ Rather, men are more likely to be employed in jobs with family-friendly characteristics because they are more likely to have authority and autonomy on the job.⁹

Using the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) Leave and Job Flexibilities Module,¹⁰ we evaluate the job characteristics and benefits available to mothers who work part time. Specifically, we compare the ability of full- and part-time employed mothers to adjust their work hours and to work at home. In addition, we evaluate paid leave access, schedule predictability, and prevalence of nondaytime work schedules in part-time jobs to assess whether part-time or full-time work has more family-friendly characteristics beyond the work-hour requirements of the job.

We begin by presenting an overview of part-time work, including prior research on the characteristics of part-time jobs, as well as the demographic characteristics of part-time workers. Next, we discuss the role of motherhood and its association with part-time and flexible work. Our data and methods section follows, summarizing the ATUS Leave and Job Flexibilities Module. Finally, we present our analyses and results showing that mothers who work in part-time jobs are more likely to work in jobs with reduced flexibility, pay, and availability of family-friendly benefits than their counterparts who work full time.

Background

In this section, we discuss the characteristics of part-time work and workers, examining the benefits, hours, and wage rates associated with part-time employment. Then, we discuss the effect of motherhood on work hours and access to family-friendly benefits for working mothers.

Characteristics of part-time work and workers

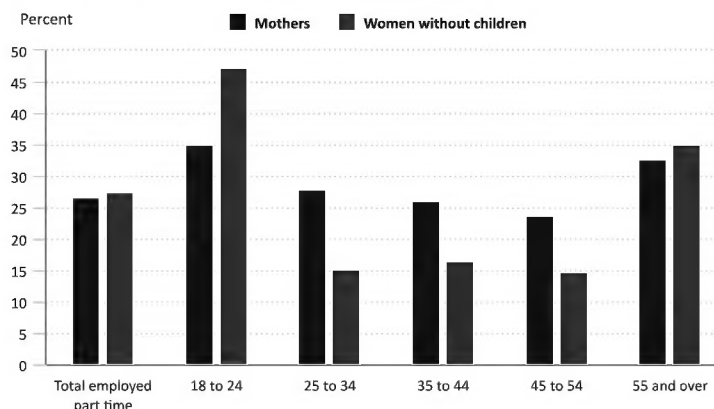
Part-time work is defined as working from 1 to 34 hours in a usual week. Most part-time workers either do not want to work 35 hours or more a week or are not available to do so.¹¹ In the United States, part-time work has lower benefits and wages compared with full-time work. That is, wages and benefits are often not prorated, and part-time workers receive disproportionately fewer benefits and lower pay than full-time workers.¹² Compared with its European Union counterparts, the United States offers limited part-time work protections and excludes protections, such as the right to request part-time hours with limited grounds for denial, equal access to pensions and leave benefits, or equal or prorated pay.¹³

The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 requires the provision of overtime pay for nonexempt workers after exceeding a 40-hour work week, but workers are generally not subject to maximum or minimum work hours; nor are employers required to provide leave, schedule flexibility, and other benefits in most states. The Internal Revenue Code and the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 allow employers to exclude most part-time workers from health insurance benefits and pension plans. The Family and Medical Leave Act requires an employee to have worked at least 1,250 hours in the past year (about 24 hours a week) to qualify, which excludes from coverage some part-time workers who have not accumulated sufficient hours or maintained a 12-month tenure. Part-time workers are much less likely than full-time workers to have access to retirement and health insurance benefits, sick leave, holiday time, and vacation time.¹⁴ Research shows a larger proportion of part-time workers than full-time workers earn the federal minimum wage or less, and women working part time earn between 16 percent and 20 percent less per hour than their full-time counterparts, after adjusting for common control variables.¹⁵

Part-time workers are more likely to be women and workers outside of their prime working years (25 to 54 years old).¹⁶ Among employed women, mothers with children under the age of 18 at home and women without children were about equally likely to work part time. About 26.6 percent of employed mothers worked part time compared with 27.6 percent of employed women without children (see chart 1).¹⁷ However, this masks considerable variation by age. Employed mothers were less likely to work part

time at younger (18–24) and older (55 and over) ages than women without children. Conversely, women without children were less likely to work part time during their prime working years (25–54) compared with mothers.¹⁸

Chart 1. Percentage of employed mothers and employed women without children, working part time, by age



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
 Note: Data include all working women.
 Source: 2017–18 American Time Use Survey.

[View Chart Data](#)



Low-wage retail and service jobs employ a disproportionate share of part-time workers.¹⁹ The economic shift away from a goods-producing sector to a growing service-providing sector contributed to the growth in part-time work throughout the economy over the past few decades.²⁰ In lower wage service-providing sector jobs, employers keep hours low, in part, to avoid liability for provision of benefits, by keeping them below the work-hour threshold in which benefit provision may be required.²¹ Employers also use shorter work hours as a form of employer flexibility to increase demand as business conditions require, at times structured through just-in-time scheduling that provides minimal advanced schedule notice to employees.²² Just-in-time scheduling poses difficulties for working parents who may neither have access to childcare on short notice nor the availability to accommodate last-minute scheduling changes.²³

Part-time options are not expansive in managerial and professional occupations. In these occupations, management and human resources may oppose making part-time work options available and may only make them available to highly valuable employees as a retention strategy.²⁴ Yet, because part-time work is less prevalent in managerial and professional occupations, those who work part time may feel more singled out and vulnerable. Research from Epstein and her colleagues shows that part-time workers in professional jobs experienced limited career prospects, less desirable work assignments, reduced networking and training, and greater vulnerability to layoffs.²⁵

Motherhood, part-time work, and flexibility

Following the birth of children, mothers are more likely to scale back their work hours compared with their hours before having children.²⁶ Mothers in professional occupations scale back their work hours, though typically remain above the part-time threshold.²⁷ Mothers in retail and service jobs tend to continue working part time after having children, because part-time hours are often a condition of employment in these sectors.²⁸ Part-time workers may be limited in their ability to seek full-time hours to the extent that their lower wages make covering the costs of full-time childcare difficult. Research has shown that mothers are more likely to work full time rather than part time in states that have more affordable childcare and longer school days.²⁹ Part-time workers are more likely than full-time workers to rely on family who may only be able to provide limited hours of care.³⁰

Location and timing of work are key dimensions of flexibility, allowing workers to combine work and family responsibilities more easily.³¹ Mothers in professional occupations have more access to these types of flexibility compared with mothers in other occupations, and they are more likely to use this flexibility to scale back their work hours by a few hours per week while remaining employed full time.³² Research shows that workers in more privileged positions and occupations with higher status and earnings are better able to shape their schedules and control their work hours and that workers with more education are more likely to have access to flexible schedules and telecommuting options.³³ The use of these benefits enables workers to employ “time shifting” in which they move paid work to better accommodate unpaid work (e.g., household tasks or childcare) and increase work-family compatibility.³⁴ However, many workers report stigma over the use of these benefits, and women without children are more likely to be able to work from home than mothers.³⁵

Whether access to work at home is a family-friendly benefit is disputed. Those who work from home tend to work longer hours.³⁶ Those hours may also come as overwork, some uncompensated, blurring the boundaries of home and work.³⁷ However, those who work at home may avoid long commutes, freeing time for other activities.³⁸ Schedule flexibility and predictability are widely believed to increase compatibility between work and family responsibilities to the extent that the worker determines the flexibility rather than the employer.³⁹

Thus far, we have established that part-time work is concentrated in lower-wage jobs with access to fewer benefits.⁴⁰ We have also established that mothers ages 25 to 54 are more likely to work part time than women without children. Now, we evaluate whether the perception that part-time jobs offer more flexibility to working mothers than full-time jobs is accurate. Although part-time jobs require fewer hours of work, which is a type of flexibility, we explore whether the scheduled hours of work for part-time workers are flexible and whether these jobs provide family-friendly benefits. Reduced hours alone may not offer a flexible working environment for mothers if the hours they are required to work are not flexible and a lack of benefits restricts the mothers’ ability to take time off for parental leave or to take care of a sick child. Therefore, we show whether mothers in part-time jobs have greater access to paid time off, to schedule flexibility, and to work-at-home benefits identified as key dimensions of flexibility compared with mothers in full-time jobs. We also evaluate whether mothers working in part-time jobs have more schedule predictability and equivalent wages.

Data and methods

To evaluate the differences in access to work benefits among full- and part-time working mothers, we used data from the 2017–18 ATUS Leave and Job Flexibilities Module.⁴¹ The ATUS is an ongoing survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The core of the ATUS is a single-day time diary

administered to individuals ages 15 and older, with additional questions about the respondent's household and employment status. Employment information includes industry and occupation, earnings, and full- and part-time status—in addition to other employment characteristics.⁴² The 2017–18 Leave and Job Flexibilities Module includes additional questions about ATUS wage and salary respondents' main job.⁴³ While the ATUS is designed to produce estimates of how respondents spend their time, the Leave and Job Flexibilities Module was designed to measure workers' access to paid and unpaid leave and to work schedules and job flexibilities, such as advance knowledge of work schedules, ability to adjust work hours, or ability to work at home.⁴⁴

For this analysis, we restricted our sample to employed mothers ages 18 and older living with at least one child under 18 years of age.⁴⁵ Using this sample, we estimated the share of workers who had access to paid leave, had the ability to adjust their start and stop times, had the ability to work at home, and worked at home at least occasionally, by full- and part-time status. While some research focuses exclusively on work that is done at home for pay, we include workers who worked at home irrespective of whether they were paid for some or all the work or if they were just taking their work home.⁴⁶ Analyzing 2001 Current Population Survey data, Song suggested that unpaid work at home may be an investment workers make expecting future returns.⁴⁷ To the extent that mothers can adjust when and where they work to accommodate their family, household, or personal needs, the ability to work at home may be viewed as a positive option. Conversely, work at home may be associated with more negative outcomes such as elevated work-to-family conflict among those who work at home to catch up on work.⁴⁸ In addition to evaluating access to paid leave, schedule flexibility, and work from home, we also examined the share who worked a daytime schedule and how far in advance workers knew their schedules.

We examined the access to these benefits for selected occupational groups. Specifically, we looked at managerial and professional occupations, service occupations, and sales and office occupations. Collectively, 93.5 percent of all working mothers in our sample were employed within one of these three occupational groups.⁴⁹

Finally, using data collected in the ATUS, we examined median hourly wages among full- and part-time working mothers. Specifically, responses to questions about usual hourly earnings were used if available; when those data were not available, usual weekly earnings were divided by usual weekly hours. For workers whose usual weekly hours vary, weekly earnings were divided by the median number of hours usually worked among full- and part-time working mothers.

Results

Most employed mothers worked full time (see table 1). In 2017–18, among employed mothers with children younger than 18 in their home, about one-fourth (23.5 percent) worked part time and 76.5 percent worked full time. About 26 percent of mothers working part time and 22 percent of mothers working full time had children younger than 3 at home. Full-time working mothers were more likely than part-time working mothers to have a teenager as their youngest child (23.5 percent compared with 17.1 percent) (see chart 2).

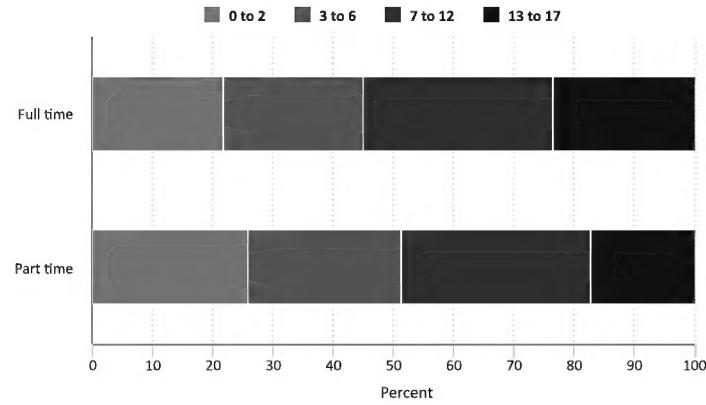
Table 1. Percentage of employed mothers living with children under 18, by full- and part-time work status and percent distribution, by age of youngest child, and by occupation

Characteristic	Total	Usually works full time	Usually works part time
Full- and part-time work status	100.0	76.5	23.5 ^[1]
Age of youngest child	100.0	100.0	100.0
0 to 2	22.8	21.8	25.9
3 to 6	23.7	23.2	25.3
7 to 12	31.5	31.5	31.7
13 to 17	22.0	23.5	17.1 ^[1]
Occupational groups	100.0	100.0	100.0
Management, professional, and related occupations	52.5	56.7	38.9 ^[1]
Service occupations	17.7	13.0	32.7 ^[1]
Sales and office occupations	23.3	23.8	21.6
Other	6.5	6.4	6.7

^[1] Difference between full- and part-time estimates is statistically significant at the 5-percent level.

Source: 2017–18 American Time Use Survey Leave and Job Flexibilities Module.

Chart 2. Age of youngest child for mothers employed full time and part time, percent distribution



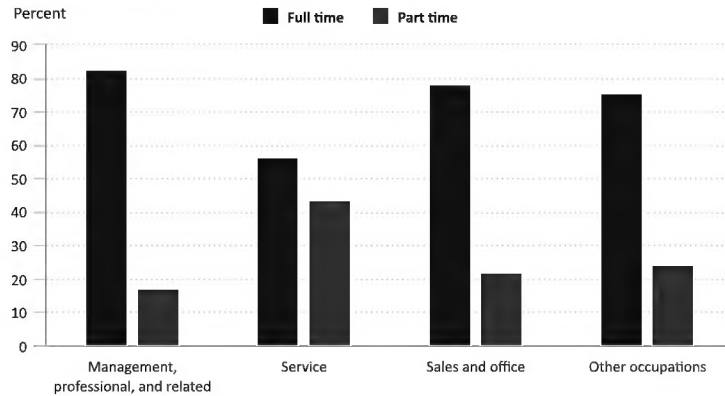
Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
 Note: Data include all wage and salary working mothers living with their children under age 18.
 Source: 2017-18 American Time Use Survey Leave and Job Flexibilities Module.

[View Chart Data](#)



Looking at the likelihood of working part time by occupation, as expected given past research, we found that 43.6 percent of mothers employed in service occupations worked part time, a larger share than mothers employed in other occupations. Mothers in managerial, professional, and related occupations were the least likely to work part time (17.4 percent) (see chart 3).⁵⁰

Chart 3. Percentage of mothers working part time and full time, by occupational group



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
 Note: Data include all wage and salary working mothers living with their children under age 18. Other occupations include farming, fishing, and forestry; construction and maintenance; and production, transportation, and material moving occupations.
 Source: 2017-18 American Time Use Survey Leave and Job Flexibilities Module.

[View Chart Data](#)



Job benefits and flexibilities available to part- and full-time working mothers

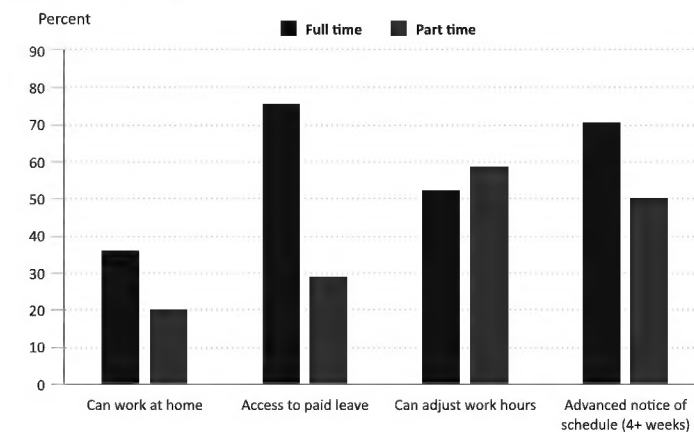
Mothers who worked part time were less likely to have access to paid leave. Only 29.3 percent of mothers who were part-time workers had access to paid leave, compared with 76.0 percent of mothers who worked full time (see chart 4). In terms of job flexibilities, mothers who worked part time had less access to working at home compared with mothers who worked full time (see table 2). While 20.3 of part-time employed mothers could work at home, this share jumped to 36.5 percent among those working full time. And, in fact, mothers employed full time were more likely to work at home (paid or unpaid), with 31.4 percent of them doing so at least occasionally compared with 18.6 percent of part-time workers.

Table 2. Percentage of employed mothers living with children under 18, with access to family-friendly benefits, reasons for working at home, and nondaytime schedules, by full- and part-time work status

Characteristic	Total	Usually works full time	Usually works part time
Job flexibilities and paid leave			
Has paid leave	65.0	76.0	29.3 ^[1]
Could work at home	32.7	36.5	20.3 ^[1]
Did work at home, at least occasionally	28.4	31.4	18.6 ^[1]
Among those who did work at home			
Paid for all work done at home	69.2	67.1	80.9 ^[1]
Paid for some or all work done at home	79.8	78.9	85.1 ^[2]
Main reason for working at home			
Coordinate work schedule with personal or family needs	32.9	31.1	42.8 ^[1]
Finish or catch up on work	25.1	26.9	15.2 ^[1]
Job requires it	16.4	14.2	28.2
Personal preference	14.2	15.4	7.8 ^[2]
Reduce commuting time or expense	8.5	9.4	3.9 ^[1]
Weather	1.8	2.1	0.0
Other	1.1	1.0	2.1
Can adjust work hours	54.1	52.6	58.9 ^[2]
Work schedules and advance notice			
Advance knowledge of schedule			
Less than 1 week	12.5	9.7	21.7 ^[1]
1 to 4 weeks	21.4	19.3	27.9 ^[2]
4 weeks or more	66.1	71.0	50.4 ^[1]
Works a daytime schedule	88.1	90.0	81.9 ^[1]
Main reason for working a nondaytime schedule			
Better arrangements for family or childcare	40.1	37.7	44.3
Nature of the job	27.6	23.0	35.8 ^[2]
Personal preference	15.1	19.1	7.8 ^[1]
Could not get any other shift	7.6	8.2	6.6
Better pay	4.3	6.4	0.5 ^[1]
Allows time for school or other job	2.8	2.5	3.3
Other	2.6	3.1	1.6

^[1] Statistically significant at the 5-percent level.
^[2] Statistically significant at the 10-percent level.
Note: Significance level refers to the difference between full- and part-time estimates.
Source: 2017–18 American Time Use Survey Leave and Job Flexibilities Module.

Chart 4. Percentage of mothers with access to family-friendly benefits, by part-time or full-time status



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Note: Data include all wage and salary working mothers living with their children under age 18.
Source: 2017–18 American Time Use Survey Leave and Job Flexibilities Module.

[View Chart Data](#)

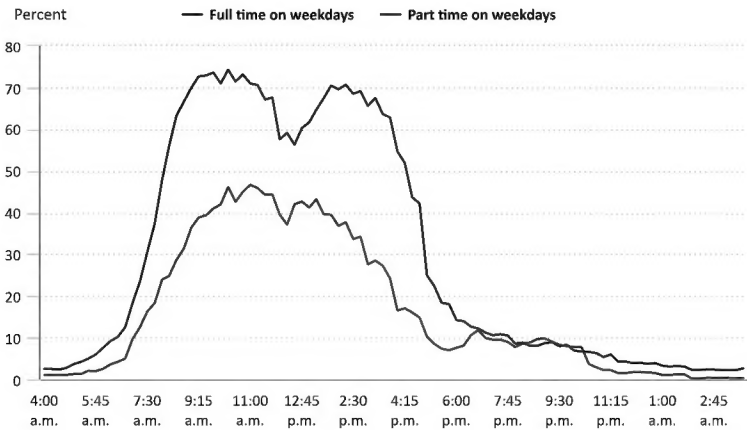


For many mothers who work at home, an advantage is that it helps with work-life balance: the largest shares of both part- and full-time working mothers state that they work at home to coordinate their family or personal needs. This reason for working at home is especially common among part-time working mothers—42.8 percent say as much, compared with 31.1 percent of full-time working mothers (see table 2). At the same time, part-time working mothers were about twice as likely to work at home because their job required it (28.2 percent versus 14.2 percent for full-time working mothers). Conversely, mothers employed part time were less likely to say that they work at home to finish or catch up on work than were their full-time counterparts (15.2 percent versus 26.9 percent). Among those working at home to catch up on work, only 27.8 percent were fully compensated; thus, they were not paid for most of this work.⁵¹ Of mothers employed full time who worked at home (for any reason), 78.9 percent were paid for some or all of their work, compared with 85.1 percent of part-time working mothers (see table 2). Mothers employed part time were less likely than were their full-time employed counterparts to cite personal preference or a desire to reduce their commute time or expenses as their main reason for working at home.

Mothers who worked part time were slightly more likely to be able to adjust their work hours, 58.9 percent compared with 52.6 percent for full-time working mothers (see chart 4 and table 2). Some of this flexibility may relate to the fact that part-time workers were more likely to be employed in jobs that lack regular hours and have last-minute scheduling.⁵² Mothers may be able to pick up shifts that are available; however, some of the schedule changes may be involuntary.⁵³ One-fifth of part-time workers (21.7 percent) had less than a week of notice of their work schedule, compared with 9.7 percent of their full-time counterparts. Although part-time workers were more likely than full-time workers to have 1 to 4 weeks' notice of their schedules (27.9 percent compared with 19.3 percent), they were less likely to have at least 4 weeks advanced notice (50.4 percent versus 71.0 percent for full-time workers) (see table 2).

Most mothers worked a daytime schedule, defined here as occurring between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. (see table 2). Among mothers, 81.9 percent of part-time workers worked a day shift compared with 90.0 percent of full-time workers. Within the range of daytime hours, peak worktimes were between 8:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. on weekdays for both full- and part-time working mothers (see charts 5 and 6). The largest share of mothers working something other than a daytime schedule (e.g., evening shifts, night shifts, split shifts, or rotating shifts) said the main reason they did so was to provide better arrangements for their family and childcare. Just over 44.0 percent of part-time working mothers and 37.7 percent of full-time working mothers worked nondaytime schedules for this reason. To the extent that workers do shift work to balance caregiving obligations, this shift work could be considered a flexible benefit. Yet, a large share of part-time working mothers (35.8 percent) worked a nondaytime schedule because it was the “nature of the job”—certainly true for many service occupations (e.g., cooks, waiters, hairdressers). In comparison, 23.0 percent of full-time working mothers said the same.

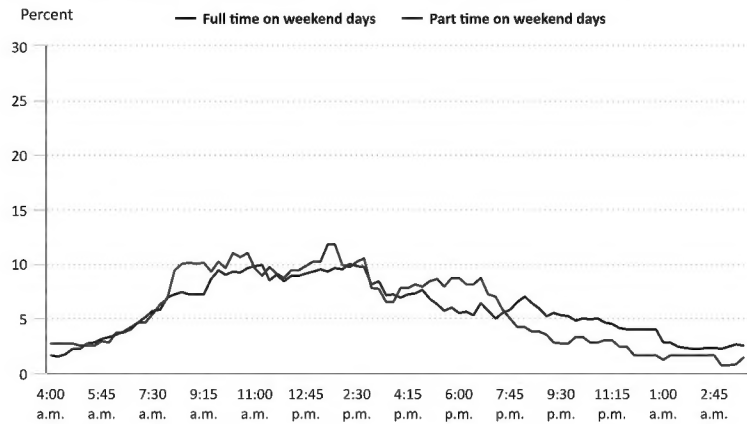
Chart 5. Percentage of mothers working on weekdays, by time of day



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Note: Data include all wage and salary working mothers living with their children under age 18 on an average nonholiday weekday.
Source: 2017-18 American Time Use Survey Leave and Job Flexibilities Module.

[View Chart Data](#)

Chart 6. Percentage of mothers working on weekend days, by time of day



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Note: Data include all wage and salary working mothers living with their children under age 18 on an average weekend day or holiday.
Source: 2017-18 American Time Use Survey Leave and Job Flexibilities Module.

[View Chart Data](#)

Disparities in benefits and flexibility by occupational group

Differences in the types of occupations in which part- and full-time working mothers were employed may have substantially contributed to differences in access to job benefits and flexibilities. Compared with mothers working full time, mothers working part time were more likely to be employed in service occupations (32.7 versus 13.0 percent) and

were less likely to be employed in managerial and professional occupations (38.9 versus 56.7 percent). Both groups of mothers were equally likely to work in sales and office jobs (see table 1).

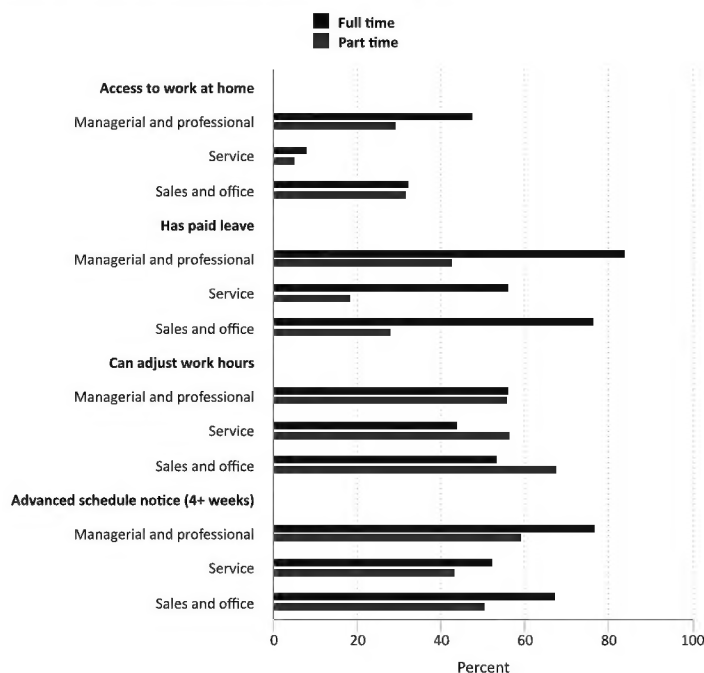
Regarding access to paid leave, even within each of these three major occupational groups (managerial and professional, service, and sales and office), part-time working mothers were less likely to have leave than mothers employed full time (see chart 7). Among mothers working in managerial and professional occupations, those employed part time were about half as likely to have access to paid leave as full-time workers (42.7 percent versus 84.0 percent) (see table 3). The gap was bigger still among mothers in service occupations, with 18.4 percent of part-time workers having paid leave, compared with 56.1 percent of full-time workers.

Table 3. Percentage of employed mothers living with children under 18, with access to family-friendly benefits, by full- and part-time work status and occupational group

Family-friendly benefits	Management, professional, and related occupations			Service occupations			Sales and office occupations		
	Total	Full time	Part time	Total	Full time	Part time	Total	Full time	Part time
Job flexibilities and paid leave									
Could work at home	44.5	47.7	29.3 ^[1]	6.9	8.1	5.3	32.4	32.5	32.0
Did work at home, at least occasionally	39.3	41.9	27.0 ^[1]	6.5	7.6	4.9	27.0	26.4	29.3
Can adjust work hours	56.1	56.1	56.0	49.7	44.2	56.7 ^[2]	56.6	53.5	67.9 ^[1]
Has paid leave	76.8	84.0	42.7 ^[1]	39.7	56.1	18.4 ^[1]	65.9	76.5	28.0 ^[1]
Work schedules and advance notice									
Advance knowledge of schedule									
Less than 1 week	9.5	7.3	19.6 ^[1]	19.8	13.7	27.6 ^[1]	10.4	9.8	12.6
1 to 4 weeks	16.7	15.8	21.1	31.7	33.8	29.0	25.9	22.8	36.9 ^[1]
4 weeks or more	73.8	76.8	59.4 ^[1]	48.5	52.5	43.4	63.7	67.4	50.5 ^[1]
Works a daytime schedule	91.4	93.6	81.1 ^[1]	77.5	73.8	82.2	89.9	92.3	81.5 ^[1]

^[1] Statistically significant at the 5-percent level.
^[2] Statistically significant at the 10-percent level.
Note: Significance level refers to the difference between full- and part-time estimates.
Source: 2017–18 American Time Use Survey Leave and Job Flexibilities Module.

Chart 7. Percentage of mothers with access to family-friendly benefits, by part-time and full-time status and occupational group



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Note: Data include all wage and salary working mothers living with their children under age 18.
Source: 2017–18 American Time Use Survey Leave and Job Flexibilities Module.

[View Chart Data](#)

Employed mothers working part time in managerial and professional occupations were less likely to be able to work at home than their full-time counterparts (29.3 percent versus 47.7 percent) (see table 3). At the same time, no statistically significant gap in access to work at home was found among full- and part-time service workers or among full- and part-time sales and office workers. Access to work at home in service occupations was quite low for all workers (6.9 percent).

Among mothers working in service occupations and sales and office occupations, part-time workers were more likely to be able to adjust the start and stop times of their jobs than full-time workers (see chart 7). Among mothers working in managerial and professional occupations, no difference in access to this form of flexibility was found.

In managerial and professional occupations and sales and office occupations, part-time workers were less likely than full-time workers to have advanced notice of their work schedule. For instance, 50.5 percent of part-time workers in sales and office occupations knew their schedule 4 or more weeks in advance compared with 67.4 percent of full-time workers (see table 3).

Mothers who worked part time earned 63 percent of full-time working mothers' hourly wages, or \$8 less per hour (see table 4).⁵⁴ Part of this wage differential stems from the disproportionate concentration of part-time workers in service occupations with lower wages. Yet, within all occupational groups, mothers earned less per hour when they worked part time rather than full time. The hourly wage ratio was smallest in service occupations (0.75) and sales and office occupations (0.75) compared with management, professional, and related occupations (0.91). That is, women working part time in service occupations and sales and office occupations earned 75 percent of the earnings of their full-time counterparts, or 25 cents on the dollar less per hour. Women working part time in management, professional, and related occupations earned 91 percent, or 9 cents on the dollar less per hour, compared with their full-time counterparts. These results are in line with prior research showing that mothers pay an hourly wage penalty when working part time, in addition to the loss of benefits.⁵⁵

Table 4. Mothers' median hourly wages and wage ratio, by full- and part-time work status and occupational group

Occupational group	Hourly wages (dollars)			Wage ratio part time to full time
	Total	Full time	Part time	
Total	18.9	20.6	12.9	0.63
Management, professional, and related occupations	26.6	27.1	24.7	0.91
Service occupations	11.9	13.1	9.8	0.75
Sales and office occupations	16.3	17.5	13.1	0.75
Other	11.8	12.0	10.5	0.88

Source: 2017–18 American Time Use Survey Leave and Job Flexibilities Module.

Summary

Most mothers worked in full-time jobs. Mothers who worked part time were more likely to have younger children and work in service occupations, compared with those who worked full time. Although part-time jobs offer shorter work hours that can improve work-life balance, they may lack many attributes that would otherwise characterize them as family friendly. Mothers in part-time jobs were less likely to have access to paid leave, they had less access to and uptake of work at home, and they received less advanced notice of their work schedules, compared with mothers employed in full-time jobs. Mothers who worked part time also earned less per hour than their full-time counterparts in the same occupational group. On the other hand, mothers employed part time in service occupations and in sales and office occupations had more flexibility to adjust their schedules than full-time working mothers in these occupations. The ability to adjust starting and ending times is an important measure of flexibility and a predictor of mothers' labor force participation.⁵⁶ Yet, some of this flexibility may reflect the more variable schedules in these occupations, particularly in service occupations.

Overall, mothers working part time were employed in jobs that lacked many of the attributes that would characterize these jobs as flexible. In contrast, mothers employed full time had greater access to family-friendly benefits. One explanation is that these mothers were more likely to work in managerial and professional occupations, which tend to offer more flexibility. But even within occupational groups, most disparities in access to leave and benefits persisted between mothers working part time and full time.

Mothers may work part time in the hours that they have childcare coverage, such as during school hours or when family or friends can provide care. This may enable them to enter and remain in the labor force. Given the high costs of childcare and the low wages offered in service occupations and sales and office occupations, full-time childcare may be unaffordable. The evidence presented here, however, does not show that part-time jobs are family friendly or flexible on most measures beyond requiring fewer hours of work. Mothers who worked part time incurred lower wages and received fewer benefits, including having access to paid leave, the ability to work at home, and advanced schedule notice.

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Notes

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- ¹¹ Dunn, "Who chooses part-time work and why?"
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- ¹⁶ Dunn, "Who chooses part-time work and why?"
- ¹⁷ Estimates presented in chart 1 include wage and salary and self-employed workers. All other tables and charts refer to wage and salary workers, the population for the ATUS Leave and Job Flexibilities Module.
- ¹⁸ In a model controlling for age, marital status, educational attainment, and occupation, mothers were about 2.2 times more likely to work part time than women without children. Among wage and salary workers only, who are the sample of workers in the ATUS Leave and Job Flexibilities Module, 23.5 percent of mothers living with a child under the age of 18 in the home worked part time and 22.4 percent of women without children worked part time.
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⁴⁰ Golden, “Part-time workers pay a big-time penalty”; and Bishow, “The relationship between access to benefits and weekly work hours.”

⁴¹ As mentioned earlier, the ATUS Leave and Job Flexibilities Module was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Women’s Bureau. For more information, see <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/leave.pdf> and <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/flex2.pdf>.

⁴² Respondents for the ATUS are selected from households that have completed the Current Population Survey. Each year, the ATUS conducts approximately 10,000 interviews and is designed to nationally represent the U.S. noninstitutional population ages 15 and over. For more information, see <https://www.bls.gov/opub/hom/atus/home.htm>.

⁴³ Self-employed workers were excluded from the module. The total sample for the 2017–18 Leave and Job Flexibilities Module was 10,071 workers.

⁴⁴ The 2017–18 Leave and Job Flexibilities Module began with questions about access to leave, including whether respondents receive paid leave at their main job and, if so, the reasons for which they can take paid leave. Following the questions about access to leave, interviewers asked respondents about how much flexibility they have in arranging their work schedules. Specifically, respondents were asked if they can vary or change the times they begin and end work. Respondents were then asked how far in advance they know their work schedules. Respondents provided answers to additional questions about their work schedules, including the time of day and days of the week they usually work. Next, respondents were asked if they can work at home. Respondents who indicated they can work at home were asked whether they ever do work at home, whether they are paid for the hours they work at home, and the main reason they work at home. For more information, see the 2017–18 Leave and Job Flexibilities Module Questionnaire at <https://www.bls.gov/tus/lvmquestionnaire1718.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Our sample included 2,271 employed mothers, of which 1,754 were employed full time and 517 were employed part time.

⁴⁶ Matthew Dey, Harley Frazis, Mark A. Loewenstein, and Hugette Sun, “Ability to work from home: evidence from two surveys and implications for the labor market in the COVID-19 pandemic,” *Monthly Labor Review*, June 2020, <https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2020.14>.

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⁴⁹ To evaluate the differences between full- and part-time workers, we tested the statistical difference of the means, using standard errors constructed from the replicate weights provided in the dataset, at the 10-percent level of significance. In selected tables, we provide 5-percent and 10-percent levels of significance on the difference between part-time and full-time workers.

⁵⁰ Because a majority of mothers are employed in management, professional, and related occupations, a large share of part-time workers are employed in this occupational group—38.9 percent of part-time working mothers (see table 1).

⁵¹ This estimate is not presented in the tables or charts. This estimate is a calculation of the share of full-time working mothers who worked at home because they needed to catch up on work but were not paid for all the at-home work.

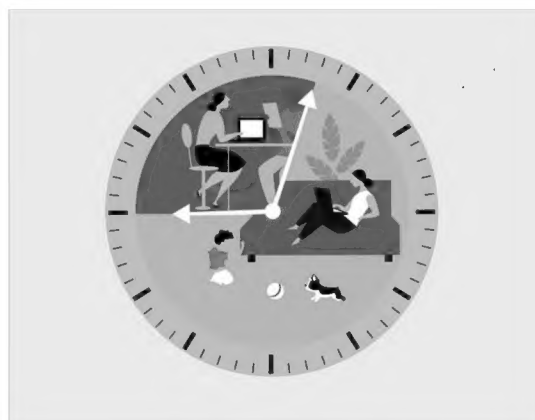
⁵² Lambert, “Making a difference for hourly employees.”

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⁵⁴ To calculate an hourly wage measure for all workers, we used hourly earnings, if available; when those data were not available, we divided weekly earnings by usual hours worked per week.

⁵⁵ Golden, “Part-time workers pay a big-time penalty.”

⁵⁶ Landivar, “Opting out, scaling back, or business-as-usual?”



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